DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 428 PS 023 231

AUTHOR McMurray, Paula; And Others
TITLE Exploring Teacher and Student Perspectives in an Early Childhood Classroom through an Ethnographic Lens.
SPONS AGENCY Iowa State Univ. of Science and Technology, Ames.
PUB DATE 14 Oct 94
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, October 14, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Communication; Conflict; Conflict Resolution; Ethnography; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Perspective Taking; Preschool Education; *Social Development; *Teacher Student Relationship; *Young Children

ABSTRACT

This study explored teacher and student perspectives of a specific event in an early childhood classroom. The study replicates previous research on the construct of positionings to study social interaction in a prekindergarten integrated classroom. Subjects were one teacher and one 5-year-old student. A 20-minute segment of videotape was observed and transcribed to: (1) identify positionings (for example, controlling, asserting; complying) from the teacher's and the student's perspectives; (2) make visible the reciprocity of social interaction; and (3) explain the participants' options in accepting or rejecting positionings. Positionings were coded by three researchers who arrived at a consensus to determine the most appropriate label for a certain behavior. Specific positionings emerged from the data which demonstrated that teachers and children have different, sometimes conflicting perspectives of the same interaction. Results suggest that early childhood teachers need to be aware of their students' perspectives to facilitate interactions, reduce conflicts, build mutual respect, and support children's autonomy. (WP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Exploring Teacher and Student Perspectives in an Early Childhood Classroom Through an Ethnographic Lens

Paula McMurray, Tricia Windschitl, Lina Bawarshi

Human Development and Family Studies

Iowa State University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 383 428

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to empirically explore teacher and student perspectives of a specific event in an early childhood classroom. The present study replicates previous research on the construct of positionings to study social interaction in a prekindergarten integrated (mainstreamed) classroom. The concept of positionings was broadened to include all participant's perspectives which occurred during social interactions in the classroom. The data are part of a comprehensive ethnography of an integrated early childhood classroom. The subjects selected for this study are one teacher and one five-year-old student who were observed during a 20-minute segment of videotape. Specific positionings emerged from the data which demonstrated that teachers and children have different perspectives of the same interaction. We illustrated the reciprocity of positionings and the participants' options of accepting or rejecting other-positionings. Early childhood teachers need to be aware of their students' perspectives to facilitate interactions, reduce conflicts, build mutual respect, and support children's autonomy.

Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois, October, 14, 1994. Research supported by an Iowa State University Research Grant.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Paula McMurray
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

PS 023231

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Exploring Teacher and Student Perspectives in an Early Childhood Classroom

Through an Ethnographic Lens

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Walkerdine (1981) and Davies (1989) introduced the construct of "subject positionings" within their work on gender development. Davies (1989) defined positionings as "possible ways of being." In their interpretations, positionings, or possible ways of being, were primarily related to power and dominance, and therefore, related to gender. These positionings are accomplished through everyday discursive practices. Further, children are exposed to such positionings throughout their lives (Davies, 1989) which influences how they create themselves as males and females.

Davies and Harre (1990) subsequently developed this construct at the microanalytic level by examining conversation and the way positionings, and the production of selves, are accomplished through specific conversations with others. They contend that "an individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate" (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 5).

McMurray (1992) and Fernie, Davies, Kantor, and McMurray (1993) extended Davies (1989) research on positionings to include both student and peer positionings along with gender positionings. These researchers described the construct of positionings as diverse, multiple, and fluid from moment to moment during social interactions in the classroom. However, these

researchers focused primarily on positionings from the teacher's perspective rather than positionings from the student's perspective.

The study extends previous research and theory (McMurray, 1992), using the concept of positionings (Davies, 1989; Walkerdine 1981), to study social interaction in a prekindergarten integrated (mainstreamed) classroom. The concept of positionings was broadened to include all participants' perspectives which occurred during social interactions in the classroom. In addition, the reciprocity of positionings which occur during this social process and participants' options of accepting or rejecting positionings was revealed. The data are part of a comprehensive ethnography of an integrated early childhood classroom in which all aspects of the classroom culture provide the context for this study.

METHODOLOGY

The basic design of ethnographic research involves open-ended, naturalistic, prolonged observation of the culture (Edwards & Westgate, 1987; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Hymes, 1982; Mehan, 1982) which includes selecting a problem or question, asking questions, collecting data, making a record (e.g., fieldnotes, video and/or audio tapes), and analyzing data for recurring patterns and events or for differences in data (Edwards & Westgate, 1987). This process is continuous during the course of inquiry and becomes self-correcting (recursive), comparative, and contrastive (Mehan, 1982) by formulating and reformulating the research problem to make it more meaningful to the theoretical solution (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983).

The setting, a university laboratory classroom, was comprised of 17 children, 9 typically developing children and 8 children with mild to moderate disabilities, from low and middle class families. The mean age of these children at the time of enrollment was four years, five months.

Five teachers planned and implemented activities with the children from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm each day of the academic year, August to May. Four to five days a week throughout the year one of two participant observers were in the classroom recording observations as fieldnotes. In addition, sixteen weeks of the year were recorded on videotape.

The subjects selected for this study are one teacher and one five-year-old student. A 20-minute segment of videotape was observed and transcribed to: (1) identify positionings from the teacher's and the student's perspectives, (2) make visible the reciprocity of social interaction, and (3) explain the participants' options in accepting or rejecting positionings. The head teacher was interviewed to obtain information about her interpretation of the incident and the child's overall experience in the classroom. She viewed the videotape during the interview and expressed her intentions during the incident. Unfortunately, the researchers were unable to interview the child due to her withdrawal from the program. Consequently, the student perspective was based on the researchers' interpretations of her behavior on the videotape, what is known about the ethnographic history of the classroom, and on the interview with the teacher.

ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATIONS

In this study, specific positionings emerged from the data. The participants exhibited behaviors or verbally expressed thoughts during social interactions that were coded as positionings. These positionings were coded by three researchers who arrived at a consensus to determine which labels were most appropriate for the behaviors exhibited.

In the following example, the teacher is attempting to remove Kris' boots; however, Kris is resisting. Kris' positionings are underlined. The teachers' positionings are in italics.

1. Kris is still sitting on Theresa's lap with her left leg around Theresa's back and
2. her right foot between Theresa's legs - <u>rejecting</u>. Theresa tries to pull Kris's

3. foot from between her legs - *controlling* - but Kris resists - rejecting. Kris
4. reaches towards Candy for the shoes - asserting - and Theresa holds her
5. back - *controlling*. Kris says "Give me that shoe" - demanding. Kris holds
6. her feet back away from Candy and around the back of Theresa - rejecting.

This scenario demonstrates that teachers and children may have different perspectives and goals for the same interaction. For example, in lines 4 and 5, Kris positions herself as "asserting," while Theresa simultaneously positions herself as "controlling." Theresa and Kris seem to have contradictory objectives which prevent them from resolving their conflict.

In the next example, the reciprocity of positionings is illustrated. When each participant positions themselves they simultaneously position the other person during an interaction. The participants positioned themselves, self-positioning, and at the same time they positioned others, other-positioning. In the following excerpt, a self-positioning (in bold and parentheses) is followed by an other-positioning (in brackets) after each behavior.

1. Kris says "Give me my shoes" **(demanding)** [complying]. "I will put it on" **(asserting**
2. **& explaining)** [accepting & listening]. Kris reaches over to get the shoes from
3. Candy **(controlling)** [succumbing]. Candy says "You'll put them on?" **(questioning)**
4. [agreeing] and gives her one of the shoes **(complying)** [accepting]. Kris makes
5. an angry face at Candy **(gloating)** [guilty/wrong]. Theresa takes Kris'
6. boots off **(controlling)** [succumbing].

In line 1 of this example, Kris positioned herself as "demanding" and the teacher as "complying." Later, lines 3 and 4, the teacher positions herself as "questioning" and Kris as "agreeing." Each participant positions themselves while simultaneously positioning the other participant. The other-positioning is either accepted or rejected depending on the action taken by the person being positioned as demonstrated by the next excerpt.

1. Theresa puts Kris on her lap **(controlling)** [succumbing] and Kris starts to
2. cry **(hurting)** [sympathizing]. Theresa takes Kris' shoes off **(controlling/**

3. **enforcing)** [succumbing]. Kris says "No! I will put them on." **(asserting**
4. **& explaining)** [accepting & understanding]. Kris arches her back **(rejecting)**
5. [accepting] and cries **(hurting)** [sympathizing] and Theresa lets her go
6. **(yielding)**. Kris sits on the floor facing Theresa. Kris looks around,
7. examines her socks **(stalling)** [disengaging], and puts her right sock
8. on **(complying & stalling)** [disengaging].

Each participant in the social interaction has the option of accepting or rejecting an other-positioning. In line 3, Kris verbally rejects Theresa's other-positioning, "succumbing." Next, Kris' self-positioning becomes "asserting and explaining", then she physically rejects Thersa's other-positioning, "succumbing," by arching her back and crying. When Theresa lets her go, lines 5 and 6, she accepts Kris' other-positioning, "sympathizing," and Theresa's self-positioning becomes "yielding." In addition, as in lines 1 and 2, a child may have "no choice" about accepting or rejecting a positioning. Kris had no choice about Theresa's other-positioning of "succumbing" because in the classroom the teacher is in control and Theresa forced Kris to sit on her lap.

In our interview with Theresa, the head teacher, she describes Kris in the following transcript.

> She seemed to understand routines and what was expected of her and rules we had for the classroom. Yet sometimes she did things because she wanted attention. I think personally that certain sensory things bothered her a lot....She got along pretty good with kids but needed to be pretty domineering, needed to be kinda the lead role in whatever she was doing. Real verbal, real dramatic all the time....She wanted to contribute things and she liked that...She liked having friends.

Theresa thought that, during the incident, Kris was asserting herself rather than being defiant which confirmed the positionings we assigned to Kris' behavior.

> I think that she just didn't want to wear the shoes. I don't think they were comfortable for her and I don't think they felt right on her foot....She really sincerely didn't like those shoes. Also I think that's another thing when I watched {the video} that I don't think she was trying to defy me, although she did, (pause) did her share of it I'm sure.

In addition, Theresa informed us that Kris' parents insisted that Kris wear the shoes which explains why Theresa persisted. Theresa said:

> I was controlling, I think controlling is the right word because I was controlling with the limits.

The preceding transcriptions of the interview with Theresa, the head teacher, helped us gain a better understanding of her intentions during the interaction. In addition, it enabled us to develop an overall understanding of Kris. Through the interview, we were able to substantiate the positionings that we assigned to both Theresa and Kris.

EDUCATIONAL/SCIENTIFIC IMPORTANCE

This research demonstrated that teachers and children have different, sometimes conflicting perspectives of the same interaction. In addition, we illustrated the reciprocity of positionings that take place during interaction and participants' options of accepting or rejecting the other-positionings. Qualitative methods make visible the complexity at which teachers and children interact in the classroom. The concept of positionings is a useful tool for highlighting these different perspectives. Early childhood teachers need to be aware of their students' perspectives to facilitate interactions, reduce conflicts, build mutual respect, and support children's autonomy.

REFERENCE LIST

Davies, B. (1989). Frogs and snails and feminist tales: Preschool children and gender. Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin.

Davies, B., & Harre, R. (1990). Positioning: Conversation and the production of selves. Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 20(1).

Edwards, A. D., & Westgate, D. P. G. (1987). Investigating classroom talk. London: The Falmer Press.

Fernie, D., Davies, B., Kantor, R., & McMurray, P. (1993). Learning to be a person in the preschool: Creating integrated gender, school culture, and peer culture positionings. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 6(2), 95-110.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1983). Ethnography: Principles in practice. London: Tavistock.

Hymes, D. (1982). What is ethnography? In P. Gilmore & A. A. Glatthorn (Eds.), Children in and out of school: Ethnography and education (pp. 21-32). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

McMurray, P. (1992). The construction, negotiation, and integration of gender, school culture, and peer culture positionings in preschool. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus.

Mehan, H. (1982). The structure of classroom events and their consequences for student performance. In P. Gilmore & A. A. Glatthorn (Eds.), Children in and out of school: Ethnography and education (pp. 59-87). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Walkerdine, V. (1981). Sex, power and pedagogy. Screen Education, 38, 14-24.